Statement of U.S. Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL)
Chairman, Science Subcommittee on Energy
Priorities in the Department of Energy Budget for Fiscal Year 2006
Wednesday, April 27, 2005

I want to welcome everyone to this Energy Subcommittee hearing on the Administration's priorities for research and development in the Department of Energy budget for fiscal year 2006.

It is no secret that we are operating in the most constrained budget environment in many years. In such an environment, it is especially important for Congress to scrutinize the plans and question the priorities of any and all departments when it comes to spending limited resources. The Department of Energy is no exception.

I'm as fiscally conservative as they come. And while I agree that we should be able to find savings in just about every corner of the federal budget, I do not believe we should be cutting corners when it comes to our search for energy solutions and the science behind them.

As the nation pays unprecedented prices for oil and natural gas and struggles to contain the resulting inflationary pressure, it seems counterintuitive to reduce funding for applied energy research and development programs that could help ease our demand for energy or lead to alternative sources of it – namely, our energy efficiency and renewable energy programs.

The same can be said for the basic science programs funded by the Department of Energy. As the nation emerges from an economic slowdown, and confronts global competition on a variety of fronts, it seems counterintuitive to cut – by almost four percent – the basic, fundamental research that is the foundation of American innovation and competitiveness.

But in some very specific ways, this is what the Administration's budget proposes to do.

Based on an analysis by subcommittee staff, funding for every applied energy R and D program has increased over the course of the last 5 years, some substantially. However, this is misleading when it comes to one program in particular. When you exclude the significant increases provided for the President's Hydrogen and FreedomCAR initiatives, the energy efficiency and renewable energy (EERE) program actually has suffered a percentage decline in the double digits over the course of the last 5 years.

Don't get me wrong. I strongly support the Hydrogen and FreedomCAR initiatives. But are we sacrificing short- and mid-term successes in many sectors for the sake of one long shot in one sector – transportation over the long-term? If so, is this a wise choice, especially considering that a National Academy of Sciences study estimated that for every dollar spent on efficiency initiatives alone between 1978 and 2000 more than four dollars of economic benefits were realized? We'll explore this more today.

At this point, I have become accustomed to lamenting proposed reductions to the nuclear energy R and D program. That is not the case this year. I am particularly pleased with proposed funding levels for the Advanced Fuel Cycle Initiative (AFCI). As costs mount over the federal government's failure to complete Yucca Mountain, I think it is time that we revisit the issue of using advanced reactors to recycle some of the spent nuclear fuel scattered across this country. This is even more critical if a plan to encourage the construction of new plants succeeds. That plan, which President Bush is expected to outline later today, would provide federal risk insurance to companies that construct new nuclear power plants.

As for the other basic research supported by the DOE, this subcommittee has noticed a trend. Three years ago, Office of Science funding for facilities equaled that for research grants. Today, funding for research grants is less than that for facilities. Considering that DOE's user facilities are oversubscribed – by a factor of three in the case of the Basic Energy Sciences program within the Office of Science – this may have been a prudent decision in light of fiscal constraints. However, I do not believe this is sustainable, especially considering that DOE's research grants help fund the education and training of approximately 23,500 graduate students, technicians, post docs, and faculty.

Finally, when it comes to new facilities, I am very concerned about the significant amount of our limited resources that this budget has allocated to the international fusion experiment known as ITER, which doesn't even have a home yet. And considering that the patience of this committee is growing thin, as we continue to wait for the DOE to respond to our written questions from a full committee hearing on the President's budget held *over two months ago*, I must again express skepticism and concern about the "moving target" that is the U.S. contribution to the ITER project. I certainly hope this is something we can nail down, and soon. I would hate for this lingering question to erode support for this project.

On that note, I will conclude by saying that I'm looking forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses here today. We are going to discuss programs that matter a great deal to our nation's energy security and our economic future. During these tight fiscal times, we must set priorities and use limited resources wisely. We are here today to make sure the proposed FY06 budget meets these standards.

Thank you very much.